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EPA announces funds to improve monitoring and water quality at New Hampshire beaches

RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE – At a press conference today on one of New England’s most scenic and pristine beaches, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a \$204,000 grant to the NH Department of Environmental Services to improve and expand the water quality monitoring and public notification programs at state coastal beaches.

Robert W. Varney, regional administrator of EPA’s New England Office, made the announcement at Wallis Sands State Park in Rye, one of 16 beaches participating in New Hampshire’s Coastal Beach Program, a three-year-old effort to improve monitoring and overall water quality at state coastal beaches. More than 500 water samples were collected and analyzed by DES last summer alone.

The EPA funding was made available through EPA’s Clean New England Beaches Initiative, which is making a total of \$1.2 million available this summer to the region’s five coastal states.

Since 2000, there has been only one saltwater beach in New Hampshire that was issued a swimming advisory due to elevated bacteria levels. The advisory took place in June 2003 at New Castle Town Beach.

Across New England last year, about one fifth of the region’s 1,300 coastal beaches were closed at least one day last summer due to pollution, for a total of about 1,100 missed beach days. That’s a tangible improvement from 2001, when the region’s saltwater beaches had nearly 1,400 beach closure days.

“We’ve made progress cleaning our waters across New England, but that does not mean we can be complacent about pollution threats that require attention,” said Varney, speaking at today’s news conference. “Even in New Hampshire, where the waters are relatively pristine, we must work to eliminate dirty storm runoff and other pollution that leads to unhealthy swimming conditions.”

“New Hampshire prides itself with its clean coastal waters,” added Michael Nolin, commissioner of the NH Department of Environmental Services. “The coastal beaches are the top choice for summer

recreation, providing valuable resources for swimming, boating, fishing or enjoying the aesthetic qualities of the ocean. This EPA beach grant provides for increased monitoring and an elevated level of public health protection. New research efforts will help identify bacteria sources to public beaches and aid in management practices that reduce these sources to our beaches.”

EPA has awarded New Hampshire nearly \$700,000 since 2001 to support and expand the state’s beach monitoring programs. The funding was made possible by the Federal Beach Act approved by Congress in 2000.

Launched two summers ago, EPA’s New England Beaches Initiative selected 11 flagship beaches across New England, including Hampton Beach in New Hampshire. These beaches were chosen as models for other beach managers and are based on several criteria: serving large populations; a history of beach closures due to pollution; high quality monitoring already in place; and a strong potential for state and federal resources to be used.

Polluted runoff and untreated sewage released into the water can contain bacteria, viruses, and protozoans, some of which can cause minor illnesses such as gastroenteritis or more serious diseases such as hepatitis. Runoff can be contaminated from pet waste, wildlife, illicit connections and various other sources. Sources of sewage include leaking sewer pipes, failing septic systems, boats and combined sewer overflows.

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